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**From:** JOEL MEDINA <joelmedina@sbcglobal.net>

**To:** appropriationtestimo@cga.ct.gov

**Sent:** Wed, March 2, 2011 9:51:12 PM

**Subject:** DCF Parole Proposed Reduction in Staff

I am submitting this to provide written testimony regarding the Governor's proposed budget which calls for the reduction of DCF Juvenile Justice Parole Officer Staff by 22 workers. This proposal to cut Parole Officers/Social Workers related to 2009 numbers. This does not take into consideration positions lost by attrition, with no rehires. If the budget passes it still calls to reduce the staff by 22, and does not consider current staffing or changes in staffing due to planned retirements or the expected influx of cases related to RAISE THE AGE legislation. It makes no conclusions as to how many Parole Officers/Social Workers or Supervisors there should be in the Department. This was an arbitrary recommendation made by the previous DCF administration as well as the previous governor based on their requirement to cut the DCF budget. Parole was targeted because we are not a part of the Consent decree which means there is no federal oversight for caseload size. The decision was made without any understanding of the role and impact Parole Officers/Social Workers have on the youth and families we serve, the relationships we have with these youth that help support them in treatment, rehabilitation, and family and community reintegration. It does not consider the progress that has been made over the years as the Parole Department has expanded to meet the needs of youth with complicated behavioral, mental health, and family issues. We are intensely involved with both youth and their families. As indicated above I believe that this proposal was made based on a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of our role within this agency and that this underlying issue is now being passed along to the new agency Commissioner as well as our new Governor. I would like to emphasize that despite our new Commissioner's short tenure as our agency head I hold her in high regard but believe that she is being misinformed about our vital role in and for the State of Connecticut and that she as well as Governor Malloy are mistakenly not recognizing the devastating impact of the proposed staffing reduction if allowed to go through as proposed.

If the truth is to be told and responded to in a responsible manner the following would be the accepted role: That we play a distinct and unique role for the state of Connecticut, for DCF, and most importantly for every town and neighborhood in the State of Connecticut including the community all of you live in this State. I do not know where any of you live but I am sure we have provided service to youth and families in your neighborhood. As DCF Parole Social Workers we provide intensive services that are implied in the juxtaposition of the words Parole & Social Worker. We provide intensive social services to committed delinquents of the State of CT as well as to their families. We are also charged with the distinct and unique responsibility to balance the needs of our youth and families with the need for community safety. Although our population includes youth who are refer to as "status offenders" who have many issues related to their family-related difficulties, and to issues related to poverty and lack of access to basic life needs (adequate housing & access to quality education) the fact of the matter is that we also service a very needy and at-risk youth who are also gang involved, violent, and present a whole list of community safety issues to the cities and towns of Connecticut. Regardless, our ultimate goals is to prepare them for a carefully planned and speedy return to their families and communities, to make them productive citizens, and to make them learning and career ready despite all of their prior life challenges. I write this knowing that these are not easily attainable goals but with the pure belief that as youth that they are worthy of these goals and aspirations.

In order to balance the two areas of concern noted above our duties involve the following items: intensive case planning assessments to reach reunification and community return, intensive school planning for our youths' eventual return to their local school districts, intensive collaboration and planning with a host of residential and community based programs as well as all

the school districts of Connecticut, primary case management responsibility for all committed delinquents in CT including the residents of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School and the former Long Lane School, and intensive collaboration with local city, town, School Resource Officers and our State Police Department.

With all these responsibility we also manage the delivery of basic life needs and securing funding for rental assistance and furniture for our families. As already stated our primary focus is in reaching reunification as expeditiously as possible but also on rehabilitation, and the prevention of behaviors that lead to reoffending such as truancy and inadequate supervision. On this last thought the supervision matter is of significant importance as we have the distinct ability to exert leverage for community supervision compliance issues and are significantly more hands-on in our approach to the management of our youth in comparison to our counterparts in the juvenile courts and within our own agency who work as Child Protection Social Workers. I want to emphasize again that our primary focus is on treatment and care but once again if the truth of the matter is to be told on what this population needs, monitoring and enforcement of court ordered mandates is an essential function in working with any offender whether adult or juvenile. This is what we do in part and no one else in the State of Connecticut can perform this function to the same intensity other than our division.

I will also like to make note of the fact that there has been some discussion to move our duties over to our counterparts within the juvenile courts. I am opposed to this, our current Commissioner is opposed to this, our former Bureau Chief Leo Arnone voiced opposition to this, and this is not a function that can be performed by our Child Protection Services counterparts in DCF. The opposition to this suggestion is based out of concern that management of our youth by the juvenile courts will become more punitive in nature as well as out of concern that vital funding by this move will be lost. I concur with this assessment. With this in mind as well as the expected increase in the number of the youth expected to come into service by our agency due to Raise the Age legislation (see below) I cannot stress enough to you the importance of maintaining a functional work force and the need to oppose the proposed reduction in our staff.

In pursuit of the best interest of the children we serve we are akin to the Spartan heritage in that we have always been small in numbers (in comparison to other state divisions), powerful, committed, and exercise no fear in defending and protecting our youth. If there is any doubt on this you can ask our former Bureau Chief Leo Arnone and Current DOC Commissioner or our Current Program Director Antonio Donis. What we absolutely do fear is the devastating impact the proposed staffing cuts will unequivocally and certainly have on DCF's ability to deliver quality and highly specialized service to one of the State's most needy population. Our focus is exclusive on serving the best interest of our youth and families. There is only so much that a work force can absorb even one with the spirit as described above. Once again the aforementioned staffing recommendation cannot be allowed to stand.

Let's look at the numbers. The report is based on 2009 staff and numbers. In 2009 we had 47 Parole Officers/Social Workers and 10 Parole Supervisors/Social Work Supervisors. Since that time we have lost 8 Parole Officers/Social Work Positions and 1 Supervisor position. The one Supervisor position lost has not been refilled. That leaves currently 39 Parole Officers and 9 Supervisors to cover the entire State.

Prior to 7/1/2011 we will have 3 additional supervisors retiring and 1 Parole Officer Retiring. So by 7/1/2011 there will be 38 Parole Officers instead of 47 and there will be 6 Supervisors instead of 10. These numbers do not include other pending retirements within the next 1.5 years including my own expected retirement at the end of May 2012 as the Hartford DCF Parole Supervisor.

If the budget passes and it still says to cut 22 parole staff, that would mean 38 minus 22 which would leave only 16 workers, 2 of which are non caseload carrying. That would leave 14 workers to cover the whole state. This would take us back to the stone age and negate all the progress

we have made over the years in providing the best services for our youth and their families. It would eliminate Units that Specialize in Gender Specific Programming for Girls who work intensely with this very needy population which requires lower caseloads. It would eliminate a Specialized Unit of workers for Sex Offenders. These Units and the ones that have only males are specialized and are experienced in these unique populations. It would increase caseloads to 2 ½ times Regional CPS Caseloads. There is no way we would be able to give the level of service and support we give now to our youth and families. Providers would not get the current level of support and presence as there is today. Community Safety would be jeopardized. The proposed staffing cuts would also result in the loss of very experienced worker in Juvenile Justice within DCF. With the RAISE THE AGE legislation 16 year olds are now treated in the Juvenile System. 17 year olds will soon be added to the Juvenile System. There is also legislation that will give DCF Parole jurisdiction over youth until the age of 20, instead of 18. All of this will increase caseloads. CSSD and CJTS are gearing up for the Raise the Age and have gotten approval to add staff. CJTS has gotten approval to invest millions of dollars to make structural changes to our facility in anticipation of the 16 and older youth who are now part of the population we serve and will continue to grow. How can this proposal to cut the DCF Juvenile Justice staff by far more than 50 percent (DCF's only true Case Management Staff) be viewed as a sensible and responsible recommendation with the afore-noted in mind and when there is no indication whatsoever that the population of our client is to decrease and when the exact opposite projection is expected with the Raise the Age Legislation that was made into law this past January and is to have the second phase implemented in 16 months (July 2012)?

This proposed budget cut would wipe out the Bridgeport Unit and the Waterbury Unit. It would also leave us with one experienced sex offender specialist. There would be five gender specific specialists for girls to cover the whole State. It would leave 8 workers to cover Males statewide. This would in no way be acceptable and kids will suffer. Our most needy population is represented by our female offenders who more often than not are victims of multiple offenses committed against them. Of concern to this is the fact that to date there remains no State operated facility for these girls despite the efforts of multiple DCF agency managers. The Juvenile Parole Staff that work with these girls have always been and continue to be the most consistent force in these girl's lives, the most expert in their care and management, and equal if not greater than the hoped construction of a State managed facility. How can the proposal to cut our staff as proposed then be viewed as a sensible recommendation?

The other question that comes to mind is that State has paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for an evidenced based needs and risk assessment and treatment planning process for our youth. Who will complete these assessments with all that should be known as reflected above?

I ask that you please consider advocating for the removal of this line item from the budget for the sake of the children and families we serve. These kids are sometimes a danger to the community but other times they are more a danger to themselves. They need the compassion, consistency, support, and regular contact that we can give.

As noted I am retiring 5/31/12. I have been working in DCF since 5/15/92. I worked in various capacities including my current role as a supervisor since June 2006. I have stayed in supervision and not sought promotion as I love these kids and the workers who are so dedicated and out of a sense of obligation to duty to this division. My colleagues and I are truly committed to helping these youth and their families.

Thank you,

Joell Medina  
Parole Supervisor  
Department of Children and Families